

15 Minute Meal Planning

In our often overscheduled lives, taking time to plan what to eat seldom ranks at the top of anyone's "To Do" list. In fact, surveys suggest that two-thirds of the adults who are responsible for preparing family meals don't think about what they'll serve until the last possible minute.

Besides offering better nutrition, planning meals also saves on the budget by cutting down on the number of trips to the grocery store and impulse buying. Fifteen minutes is really all it takes to scan your calendar, check the grocery ads for specials or look in a cookbook in order to outline the week's menus. If a week seems too long, start with the next three or four days. Just remember that the more frequently you shop, the more it's costing you both in money and time.

Use the Food Guide Pyramid to plan nutritious meals and snacks. Healthy food gives you more value for the dollar. Start with plenty of grain choices such as bread, rice, and pasta. They provide carbohydrates for energy as well as some protein. Add fruits and vegetables for vitamins and minerals. More matters! Choose lower fat servings from the milk and meat group for protein, calcium and iron.

When meal planning, some people start with a rotation plan. The main meal for each day is based on a different protein group, such as beef followed by chicken, followed by pork, followed by fish, followed by vegetarian.

Busy cooks may choose to create a time-oriented plan based on how the food will be prepared. Perhaps Day 1 allows for a cook-from-scratch dinner, Day 2 requires a slow-cooker stew that is ready to eat when you walk in the door, and Day 3 uses leftovers from Day 1.

Time spent planning and preparing nourishing meals is a good investment!

For more ideas, the new Iowa State University web site, *Spend Smart, Eat Smart*, has money saving tips for meal planning. You'll definitely want to check out the 4 day template for planning meals at:

<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/mealplanning/>

Nancy Clark
Nutrition and Health Field Specialist
ISU Extension
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Source: new ISUE website: www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings